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ABSTRACT

With some notable exceptions, the school critics in the first and second "waves" of restructuring have largely neglected problems of resistance in implementation of reform. The primary task of managing change is not technical, but motivational. Building commitment to innovation among those who must implement it requires a focus on readiness. Implementation depends on four change dimensions that often impede restructuring efforts: (1) substance (the content of reform); (2) staff (the faculty's willingness and capacity for change); (3) setting (the strength of a school as an organization); and (4) leadership. Problems encountered in the first three dimensions place an exceptional burden on the fourth. Authentic leadership is needed to overcome these obstacles; leaders must no longer aim at manipulating subordinates, but at motivating followers who invest themselves actively and become self-managing, engaged participants. Five biases for innovative leadership action include clarity, participation, communication, recognition, and confrontation (versus avoidance). All these artful endeavors are effective when rooted in authenticity. Authentic leaders demonstrate a clear commitment to new goals while inspiring, pushing, modeling, advocating, and confronting. At the same time, they show a strong investment in teachers by acknowledging, encouraging, rewarding, respecting, and listening. (Contains 20 references.) (MLH)

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THE HUMAN FACE OF REFORM:

Meeting the Challenge of Change through Authentic Leadership

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> There can be no significant innovation in education that does not have at its center the attitudes of teachers.
>
> –Neil Postman and Carl Weingartner

It has long since become commonplace to note the chronic, cyclical, ephemeral nature of school reform. Indeed, one might now say of reform, as Samuel Johnson did of remarriage, that it represents the triumph of hope over experience. The current question is whether the latest round of reform—"restructuring"—will avoid the fate of its predecessors, faiing to make the transition from advocacy to implementation. Its advocates have already won the support of policymakers, business leaders, and legislators. But whether the nation's classrooms will be restructured depends on whether the nation's educators will make the changes asked of them—a vast process of adaptation that must be accomplished teacher by teacher, school by school. And teachers, significantly, are the one constituency not captivated by the new agenda. While many have embraced it, many more have not. In schools that are supposedly restructuring it is easy to find teachers who have made only minor changes or none at all. And in schools everywhere it is easy to find those who are strongly opposed—even when innovation aims to empower them. To implement reform in the face of this resistance is an enormous challenge, one that falls heavily on school leaders.

It is a challenge they must undertake with little help from advocates of restructuring. With some notable exceptions, the school critics in the first and second "waves" of restructuring, like those of earlier decades, have largely neglected the realities of implementation. However accurate their diagnoses or inviting their prescriptions, they show a remarkable naiveté about how people and institutions change, virtually ignoring problems of resistance. Some critics

simply expect teachers to carry out their proposals, others seek to compel change by regulatory mandates or market forces—strategies that have failed in the past. Most see innovation largely as a rational redesign of the school's "goals, official roles, commands, and rules" (Deal 1990). They treat reform as a product and, focusing on its structural frame, often overlook its human face. But change must be accomplished by people. The key to implementation is to focus on this human face, to see innovation as a generative process (Shahan 1976) and understand its personal and organizational dynamics (Fullan 1991). This requires us to broaden our perspective on change and rethink the essentials of leadership.

Realities of Change

Students of organizational behavior have long recognized that resistance to innovation is deeply rooted in individual psychology and group culture (Schein 1985). Human beings are profoundly ambivalent about change. We exalt it in principle—change, like productivity, has become an icon in corporate, political, and educational mission statements—but we oppose it in practice, disliking alterations in even our smallest daily routines. Thus, reform inevitably involves a double standard: when we advocate change we usually mean *by other people.* Our ambivalence is sensible. Change raises hope because it offers growth, mastery, and novelty, but it also stirs fear because it challenges competence and power, creates confusion and conflict, and risks the loss of continuity and meaning (Bolman and Deal 1991). When institutions are restructured we worry about adjusting, about losing status and influence, even our job. Relationships grow more uncertain, tensions increase. And most important, when radical change reshapes roles and disrupts the stability of our workplace it threatens our very sense of purpose. The primary metaphor for change is, as Peter Marris (1986) has eloquently shown, loss: we suffer bereavement not just from the death

of loved ones, but from the discrediting of the assumptions by which we live and make sense of our world and our work.

It is precisely to preserve stability that organizations build culture—a set of strongly embedded assumptions, values, and customs that ensure continuity and sustain meaning. This fundamental conservatism in the culture of institutions shapes their response to demands for change. As Sarason (1990) notes, schools, like most organizations, accommodate in ways that require the least modification because "the strength of the status quo—"its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of...what seems right, natural, and proper—almost automatically rules out options for change."

Resistance is inevitable, yet implementation requires the active support of a critical mass of staff. Hence, the primary task of managing change is not technical but *motivational*: to build commitment to innovation among those who must implement it. This requires a focus not just on an institution's need for reform, but on its readiness. In this view, implementation depends on four dimensions of change: (1) substance—the content of the reform; (2) staff—the faculty's willingness and capacity for change; (3) setting—the strength of the school as an organization; and (4) leadership. To examine restructuring on the first three dimensions is to see that it places an exceptional burden on the fourth.

IMPEDIMENTS TO RESTRUCTURING

1. Substance. If staff are to commit themselves to innovation and risk its anxieties and losses they must find the new goal both desirable and feasible (Beckhard and Harris 1987). Whether they do so depends first on its origin, clarity, and meaningfulness. Teachers are most likely to accept change when it is

espoused by someone they trust, its content is linked to values they hold important, and its target is focused and practicable. Far from commending itself to teachers in these ways, restructuring invites their skepticism. Developed mostly by those they mistrust—policymakers and university experts—it emphasizes many practices they commonly oppose, such as heterogeneous grouping, accountability, and mandated curricula and testing. Moreover, teachers know that in substance most proposals are not new, but resemble previous failed efforts, joining a "carousel of reform," that has left many practitioners cynical (Deal). "Every few years," says a teacher, "these 'experts' propose something 'revolutionary' that we've seen before that didn't work then."

To many teachers, the restructuring agenda seems both murky and unwelcome due to its lack of focus and the extent to which it expands the school's accountability. Though critics of schools appear to agree on the need for swift, radical redesign, they disagree about which are the key problems. Their divergent views have produced a rash of rival proposals, each addressing different aspects of schooling, some in conflict with one another. In many districts, this translates into a press for what one principal calls "multiple, simultaneous improvement:"

> We're tackling school-based management, K-12 science revision, cooperative learning, and full-tilt mainstreaming. Each gets one inservice a year and their other meetings conflict with one another. We don't know what to focus on or how to do it all.

In such a scenario, there is a confusion of ends and means and a fragmentation of effort and resources; follow-through is weak, frustration high.

Restructuring also exaggerates the school's responsibility. Where earlier reformers saw educational issues in a broad social context, most current

advocates focus only on the school. Reversing the infamous rising tide of mediocrity depends directly on improving instruction (Elmore and McLaughlin 1988). The accountability assigned to the school is clear, but excessive. Poor scores and high dropout rates reflect not just the shortcomings of the school, but the decline of family and community and the growing diversity and poverty of students. Teachers react bitterly to the view that, as one puts it, "We cause it all and should cure it all."[1]

2. Staff. Staff members' response to reform depends not just on its substance, but on their own readiness for change. Innovation benefits from a faculty that is energetic, flexible, and highly invested in its work. However, most of America's teachers find themselves in midlife and midcareer, an era when the stresses of life and work commonly intensify the natural reluctance to change (Evans 1989). Their personal lives have grown more complex and, like other professionals who have spent years in the same job, they are naturally prone to a *loss of motivation* and a *levelling off of performance* (Schein 1978). These tendencies are reflected in:

1) a shift away from work priorities toward personal concerns, including one's health, mortality, and transitions in one's family;
2) a growing focus on material—vs. intrinsic—job rewards;
3) loss of the experience of success with consequent damage to morale—mastery lessens both the challenge in the job and recognition for performance;
4) reduced flexibility and openness—resistance to change increases.

Though normal, these characteristics have enormous, largely ignored implications for restructuring. They make teachers more vulnerable to stress and more sensitive to criticism and they reduce teachers' appetite for change at work, leaving them less able and less willing to respond to calls to restructure.

3. Setting. The adoption of innovation also depends importantly on the specific setting in which it occurs, the institutional readiness for change created by the school's organizational and cultural resources. A strong fiscal and political base and a culture that nurtures competence, morale, and initiative help staff adapt to the requirements of change. Unfortunately, teachers can rarely turn to their schools for such support. As organizations, schools are themselves trapped between rising demands and limited resources. For years they have contended with relentless expansion in the scope and sophistication of their tasks, from curriculum to social services. At the same time, the students they serve have grown more diverse, disadvantaged, and challenging to teach. Even as they struggle to meet these burgeoning responsibilities, many districts have lost the support that underwrites innovation—shrinking budgets mean larger classes and less staff development. As Louis and Miles (1990) have shown, change is resource-hungry. Schools that have made better progress innovating have tended to make significant use of consultants and trainers. Sadly, across the country, few educators can remember when the disparity between expectation and resource was greater.

In such a setting, to foster any degree of forward movement requires a vital institutional culture that maintains continuity and reaffirms for staff the value of their work. A faculty that shares a common purpose and a strong tradition is buffered against despair and better able to sustain its effort (McLaughlin and Yee 1988). If the culture also supports risk-taking, staff are more willing to innovate. Sadly, in many schools the culture nurtures neither commitment, competence, nor initiative: teachers cannot identify a mission that unites them and drives their work. Though there are many educators whose dedication and skill thrive

despite the most difficult circumstances, too often the culture of the school fails to encourage teachers' best.

These issues make teachers' resistance to restructuring understandable, but do not deny the urgent need to improve schools. On the contrary, they argue that *reform must reflect the realities of implementation*, especially the need to build teacher commitment. This poses a unique challenge to school leaders and requires a new emphasis in leadership.

GETTING THERE FROM HERE: AUTHENTIC LEADERS

Over the past 30 years, many leadership theories have been urged on school administrators. Some prescribe systematic rules, others advocate a range of "styles" to be applied situationally. Most emphasize leadership-as-technique, reducing it to lists of skills and competencies. Expertise is surely important, but a preoccupation with leadership as *primarily* technical is seriously flawed, particularly in pursuit of radical change.

As Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) observe, few of us can switch styles effectively—we are creatures of habit, experience, and personality. Moreover, all leaders have developed an implicit philosophy of leadership, a set of assumptions about human nature, about organizational behavior, about leadership, and about what produces outstanding results. Though often tacit, these assumptions shape a leader's behavior. They are his true colors, readily visible to colleagues and staff. Trying to vary his style or apply technique risks making him seem inconsistent and insincere. This is damaging to reform because respect for, and trust in, the leader are crucial to staff willingness to undertake change.

On this key question of motivation, a new group of theorists is emphasizing the primacy of *authenticity* in leadership. Badaracco and Ellsworth, Sergiovanni (1992), and Schlechty (1992) all stress that leaders must aim not at manipulating *subordinates*, who do as they're bidden, but at motivating *followers*, who invest themselves actively, who become self-managing, engaged participants. This requires leaders who are skillful, but who above all are credible. To be credible, they must be authentic, that is, distinguished by their integrity, by a fundamental consistency between their beliefs, goals, and actions.

Authentic leaders link what they think, what they seek, and what they do. They join, in Sergiovanni's terms, "the head, heart, and hand" of leadership. Their practice is rooted in the ancient injunction to "know thyself." They make their assumptions explicit about such questions as:

> Which basic values guide my work? What motivates teacher performance? How do I define my role as leader? What are my goals for this school? How do my actions demonstrate my values and my goals?

A principal whose personal values and aspirations for her school are consistent, coherent, and reflected in her daily behavior is credible and inspires trust—a leader worth following into the uncertainties of change.

FIVE BIASES FOR ACTION

Clarifying their own assumptions helps leaders develop biases for action—general operating principles, not rigid rules—to direct their work and shape the implementation of change.[2] From the organizational research and from my own work with schools that are restructuring, five biases stand out as fostering innovation: clarity; participation; communication; recognition; and confrontation. Each relates to measures recommended in many leadership theories. In calling them "biases," I emphasize that they are not cookie cutter techniques but basic

viewpoints, fundamental convictions within leaders that provide a guiding framework for their decisions and behavior.

1. Clarity and focus. Many school leaders have been taught that the ideal is to be flexible, to enlarge their repertoire of styles, the better to manage multiple constituencies. Flexibility has its uses, but can deprive a school of a sense of unity, priority, and direction. More important, it cannot provide the *sine qua non* of change—a clear, compelling vision. It is widely accepted that vision is vital to innovation, that effective leaders inspire commitment and invigorate performance by engaging their schools in a commitment to shared purposes. Vision workshops proliferate at conferences and mission statements flower in schools. But too many of the latter end up blurred—long lists of discrete objectives or vague generalities, promises of all things to all constituencies—and fail to inspire anyone.

Authentic leaders are biased toward *clarity* and *focused* on their goals. Their vision for change may be broad and deep, but it has a definite center that concentrates effort, attention, and resources—ideally, on one initiative. This does not mean innovation must be narrow. It may be wide-ranging and multi-faceted, provided its elements mesh well and have a unifying focus. An excellent example is Theodore Sizer's (1984) "essential school," which is based on nine "common principles" that combine into a coherent, comprehensive program for secondary school reform. But the larger any project, the fewer there must be.[3] Hence, though authentic leaders do not ignore the competing interests of different constituencies, they are consistently clear about which have priority and they guard against fragmenting the efforts of their staff.

2. Participation—not paralysis. The value of collaborative decision-making in schools is also widely acknowledged: participation is a primary path to commitment, and implementation improves when teachers help shape reform. Collaboration has been enshrined as an ideal in school governance—so much so that many advocates of reform expect teachers to embrace enthusiastically any opportunity for participation. But when teachers have little history of meaningful involvement and when they struggle with the problems outlined earlier, they tend to engage less readily than leaders anticipate, particularly when the reform undertaken is complex.

Authentic leaders are biased toward participation, but are ready to assert themselves as needed to foster innovation. In Chicago, newer principals committed to site-based management discovered that many teachers, unused to any role in decision-making, became anxious when given a voice in schedules, curriculum, teaming arrangements, etc. When principals slowed the pace of change, framed choices more extensively, and provided greater guidance, teachers began to respond more confidently.[4]

This readiness to intervene persists even when change is well underway. At Parkway South High School in suburban St. Louis, principal Craig Larson has found that even with the active support and extensive involvement of a strong core of teachers, restructuring has sometimes meant giving an extra push and renewed permission, especially when enlarging innovation:

> Sometimes people hesitate and worry: can we go the next step? Can we really try a major change in our system of assessment or graduation requirements or our schedule? A principal needs to say, "Yes we can."[5]

Even while encouraging collaboration, leaders must serve as the voice of change.

3. Communication. It is an axiom of organizational change that the larger the innovation, the greater the need for communication. The anxiety and uncertainty caused by major changes in role and structure guarantee confusion and misunderstanding. They require extra effort to assure school-wide clarity about ends and means, and to keep leaders aware of staff reactions. Yet schools often plunge into reform without adequate provision for transition management, for monitoring and feedback.

Authentic leaders are strongly biased toward clear communication. Many are eloquent, but all convey their goals through their very consistency. And they are eager, respectful listeners. Their bias toward communication is reflected in steps that facilitate the sharing of information and the constructive use of feedback. At the individual level, this may involve an "open door" policy and an active personal outreach to staff. It may also include the creation of a group to help manage transition—a "kitchen cabinet" or a formally chosen "advisory council" that meets regularly with the leader to monitor the project, transmit staff views, and plan modifications (Beckhard and Harris). At a collective level, it is helpful to plan periodic faculty meetings specifically to reflect on the initiative, take the pulse of change, respond to concerns, and renew commitment. These are also times when leaders can acknowledge the loss that change often means for staff. When teachers feel that this loss is truly heard, even as the need for change is reaffirmed, their resistance diminishes. When it is ignored or overridden, resistance stiffens.

4. Recognition—in all directions. In most schools, recognition levels are chronically low. Yet due to the life and career issues veteran teachers encounter, they need more reward, not less—a need that intensifies when they are asked to

undertake change. So, restructuring leaders must be active cheerleaders and coaches, not so much to "sell" change as to reward it. These roles, often devalued by administrators, are repeatedly endorsed in studies of organizational change and, as Mojkowski (1991) observes, are especially apt in schools because they capture "the essence of mentoring at the heart of mastery."

Authentic leaders take the initiative in providing large doses of recognition and then move toward institutionalizing it among staff. They know that especially in the early stages of change when uncertainty is highest, a faculty needs confirmation (public and private) of its effort and its initial successes, even if these seem modest. They are likely to recognize not only teachers' results, but their effort. A key goal of innovation is to enhance experimentation, to encourage teachers to do not just *better*, but *more and different*, so leaders reward any willingness to explore the new agenda or pursue new approaches. They also know that morale and innovation are both improved by greater *lateral* recognition among colleagues, so they look to engage teachers in direct discussion of ways to improve the flow of appreciation in all directions.

5. Confrontation (vs. avoidance). Despite these constructive steps, some staff still resist change. Of these, some try to fulfill the new goal and fail, but think they are succeeding; others refuse to try. Together, they test a leader's authenticity and commitment. A bias toward confrontation is essential. To ignore overt opposition or sabotage is to lose credibility and undercut reform. Yet, to challenge it is awkward, unpleasant, and violates a tradition in schools of *avoiding* conflict. Moreover, there is no proven methodology. Schools lack many of the extrinsic motivators (compensation, promotion, demotion, etc.) used elsewhere to address resistance. And most systems of performance appraisal

assume higher levels of commitment and self-reflection than staunch resisters demonstrate.

One model that does offer promise is Schein's (1987), which illustrates authentic leadership at its best. It begins by acknowledging a frank truth: no amount of feedback produces change in the uncommitted. Tenured teachers whose commitment cannot be won are virtually beyond reach. (Even so, if they actively oppose change they must be vigorously challenged so that the leader's commitment to innovation is clear and those staff who are "on board" are supported.) For staff who do not oppose the new goal but whose performance must be "unfrozen," Schein calls for the presentation of disconfirming feedback in a climate of psychological safety. The aim is to arouse appropriate anxiety or guilt by showing a teacher how his performance fails to meet a shared goal or violates a shared ideal, but to do so in a way that avoids humiliation, that conveys respect and caring for the teacher as a person and a willingness to help him improve. Schein rightly calls this "one of the most complex and artful of human endeavors."

A Bridge to the Future: Reach and Realism

In truth, all the above steps are complex, artful endeavors. Yet each is easier and more effective when its artfulness is rooted in authenticity. And together they provide a crucial ingredient in building teachers' commitment to reform: continuity. On the one hand, authentic leaders demonstrate a clear, consistent commitment to new—and focused—goals: they inspire, push, model, advocate, and confront. At the same time, they show a strong investment in teachers: they acknowledge, encourage, reward, respect, and listen. When teachers see that a

leader is truly invested in reform—but also in them—they are far more likely to accept the risks of change. They have a bridge to the future.

This bridge must be built on twin expectations: reach and realism. We know that many schools need sweeping change. We know, too, that high standards elevate performance. Yet restructuring could not be a tougher challenge. It demands perspective. To truly accomplish all we can, we must appreciate what constitutes real achievement. We must measure progress against the ideal outcome *and* the actual baseline. Real change is always personal, organizational change always incremental. Success will require both high strivings and realistic acceptance—and authentic leaders who keep a steady focus on the human face of reform.

I am deeply grateful to Norman Colb and Keith Shahan for their help.

[1] None of this denies the potential of individual proposals. But no one should expect teachers to embrace ideas that they didn't develop, that they generally oppose, that have previously failed, and that reach them as competing sets of unrealistic and unfair demands.

[2] Badaracco and Ellsworth use "prejudice" instead of "bias." My discussions of *clarity*, *participation*, and, *confrontation* draw on their views.

[3]This is particularly true of reforms aimed at pedagogy or governance, which challenge entrenched cultural norms and behavioral regularities of schools, and require teachers to abandon the beliefs, assumptions, habits, and roles of a lifetime. To persuade, prepare, and support an entire faculty for either is an enormous undertaking all by itself.

[4] Reported by principals at a seminar I led at the 1991 Fall Forum of the Coalition of Essential Schools, in Chicago.

[5] Personal communication.

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